Nouns

HSK 3 Grammar

Original teaching practice. Read one pattern, cover its model and try the questions before checking the separate answer section. Examples adapted from Chinese Grammar Wiki (AllSet Learning, CC BY-NC-SA) retain the course-reference provenance.

Time / Verb + 以前 (before ...)

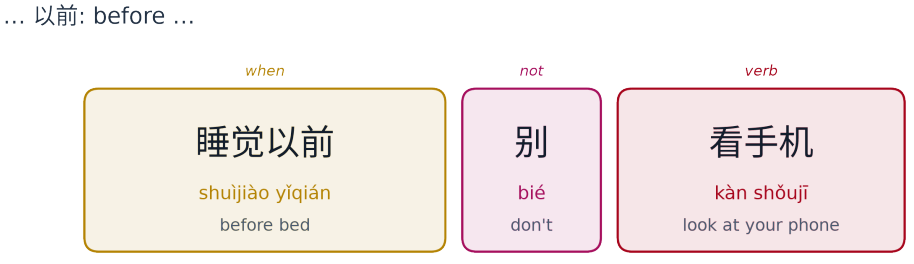
Before you go to bed

- Your doctor gives you advice about a good night's sleep.
- **睡觉以前别看手机。** – "Don't look at your phone before going to bed."

Time / Verb phrase + 以前

- **X + 以前** = "before X". Unlike English, 以前 comes after the time or action: 八点以前, 上课以前.
- The whole phrase usually comes before the main verb: 你八点以前来吧.

你八点以前来吧。
nǐ bā diǎn yǐ qián lái ba
Word guide: 你 – you; 八点 – eight o'clock; 以前 – before; 来 – come.



Deadlines and order

- **星期五以前要交作业。** – "The homework must be handed in before Friday."
- **吃饭以前要洗手。** – "Wash your hands before you eat." 前 alone can replace 以前 in short phrases: 饭前, 睡前.

吃饭以前要洗手。
chī fàn yǐ qián yào xǐ shǒu
Word guide: 吃饭 – eat; 以前 – before; 要 – must; 洗手 – wash hands.

■ 以前 comes last

- Put 以前 after what it refers to: 上课以前, not 以前上课 (which means “in the past, I attended class”).
- The 以前 phrase goes before the main verb, not at the end: 我十点以前回家, not 我回家十点以前.

■ 以前 versus 前

- 以前 works after any time or action: 三天以前, 出国以前.
- 前 is shorter and fixed in some phrases: 三天前, 睡前, 饭前. Both mean “before” here.

我三天前到北京。
wǒ sān tiān qián dào Běi jīng
Word guide: 我 – I; 三天 – three days; 前 – ago; 到 – arrived in; 北京 – Beijing.

■ Recap

- **Time / action + 以前** = before …; it follows what it refers to.
- The phrase sits before the main verb. 前 is a shorter form: 三天前, 睡前.

Practise this pattern step by step.

以前，… (in the past, …)

■ How things used to be

- Your grandmother looks at old photos of her village with dirt roads and no cars.
- **以前这儿没有路，现在有很多车了。** – “There used to be no road here; now there are lots of cars.”

■ 以前，… = “in the past, …”

- **以前** at the start of the sentence (or after the subject) = “before, in the past”, often contrasted with 现在.
- It describes a past habit or state: 我以前住在上海 – “I used to live in Shanghai.”

我以前住在上海。
wǒ yǐ qián zhù zài Shàng hǎi
Word guide: 我 – I; 以前 – used to; 住 – live; 在 – in; 上海 – Shanghai.

以前 … 现在 …: then and now



Then and now

- **他以前不喜欢吃辣的，现在很喜欢。** – "He didn't use to like spicy food; now he loves it."
- The contrast with 现在 is very common; often no 了 is needed for a past habit.

他以前不喜欢吃辣的。
tā yǐ qián bù xǐ huan chī là de
Word guide: 他 – he; 以前 – used to; 不 – not; 喜欢 – like; 吃 – eat; 辣 – spicy; 的 – food.

Which 以前 is it?

- Alone at the front or after the subject, 以前 = "in the past": 以前我不会做饭.
- After a time or action, it = "before": 上课以前 – "before class". Check what comes before it.

以前 versus 过去 and 原来

- 过去 also means "in the past", a little more formal: 过去这里是一个小村子。
- 原来 = "originally", stressing that it later changed: 他原来是老师，后来当了作家。

他原来是老师。
tā yuán lái shì lǎo shī
Word guide: 他 – he; 原来 – originally; 是 – was; 老师 – a teacher.

Recap

- **以前，...** = in the past, used to …; often contrasted with 现在.
- X + 以前 = before X. 过去 = in the past (formal); 原来 = originally.

Practise this pattern step by step.

刚才 (a moment ago)

A missed call

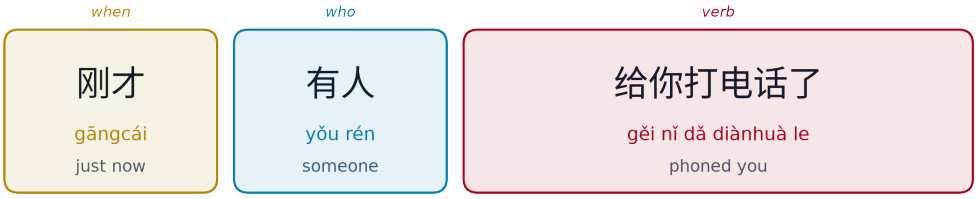
- You come back from the shower and see your roommate pointing at your phone.
- **刚才有人给你打电话了。** – "Someone called you a moment ago."

刚才 is a time word

- **刚才** = "just now, a moment ago". Like 昨天 or 今天, it can stand before or after the subject.
- 刚才我在洗澡 / 我刚才在洗澡 – "I was in the shower just now."

我刚才在洗澡。
wǒ gāng cái zài xǐ zǎo
Word guide: 我 – I; 刚才 – just now; 在 – (ongoing); 洗澡 – take a shower.

刚才: a moment ago



Actions, states and the negative

- Action: **你刚才去哪儿了?** – "Where did you go just now?"
- State or negative: 刚才很安静 – "It was quiet a moment ago." 刚才我没听见 – "I didn't hear just now."

你刚才去哪儿了?
nǐ gāng cái qù nǎr le
Word guide: 你 – you; 刚才 – just now; 去 – go; 哪儿 – where.

刚才 is only minutes ago

- Use 刚才 for a moment ago in the same situation; for "recently" over days, use 最近 or 刚.
- 刚才 can go first in the sentence; 刚 cannot: 刚才他来了 ✓, 刚他来了 ×.

刚才 versus 刚

- 刚 is an adverb before the verb: 他刚走 – "He has just left."
- 刚才 is a time word: 他刚才走了 – "He left a moment ago." Both are common; only 刚才 works with adjectives and 没.

他刚走。
tā gāng zǒu
Word guide: 他 – he; 刚 – just; 走 – leave.

Recap

- **刚才** = a moment ago; a time word that can start the sentence.
- It works with actions, adjectives and 没. 刚 is the adverb "just" before a verb.

Practise this pattern step by step.

Time / Verb + 时 (when ...)

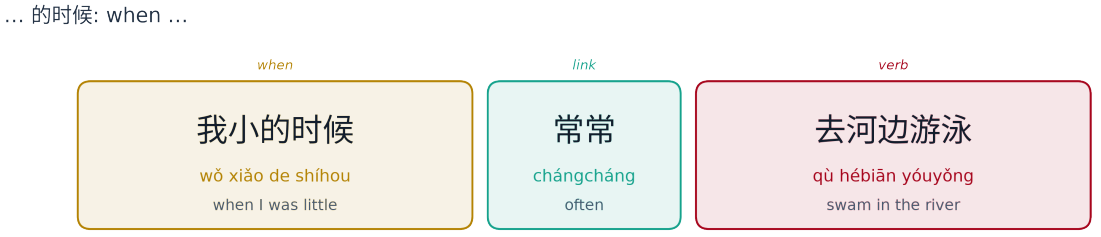
When I was little

- You are telling a friend a story from your childhood about learning to swim.
- **我小的时候常常去河边游泳。** – "When I was little, I often went swimming by the river."

Time / Verb phrase + 时 (的时候)

- **X + 的时候** = "when X". The spoken form is 的时候; the shorter **时** is more written: 上课时, 下雨时.
- Like 以前, 时 comes after what it refers to.

上课时，请关手机。
shàng kè shí qǐng guān shǒu jī
Word guide: 上课 – in class; 时 – when; 请 – please; 关 – turn off; 手机 – your phone.



Spoken 的时候

- **我到家的时候，他已经睡了。** – "When I got home, he was already asleep."
- **你有空的时候给我打电话。** – "Call me when you have time."

我到家的时候，他已经睡了。
wǒ dào jiā de shí hou tā yǐ jīng shuì le
Word guide: 我 – I; 到 – arrive; 家 – home; 的时候 – when; 他 – he; 已经 – already; 睡 – sleep.

Order and the right word

- 时 / 的时候 goes after the clause: 下雨的时候, not 时候下雨.
- In a "when" clause, do not use 什么时候 (that asks "when?"): 我到家的时候, not 我什么时候到家.

时 versus 的时候

- Use 的时候 in conversation: 吃饭的时候别说话.
- 时 suits signs, writing and short fixed phrases: 用餐时请勿吸烟 – “No smoking while dining.”

吃饭的时候别说话。
chī fàn de shí hou bié shuō huà
Word guide: 吃饭 – eat; 的时候 – when; 别 – don’t; 说话 – talk.

Recap

- **X + 的时候 / 时** = when X; it follows the clause it belongs to.
- 的时候 is spoken, 时 is more written. 什么时候 asks a question; it is not “when” in a statement.

Practise this pattern step by step.

以后 (after / in the future)

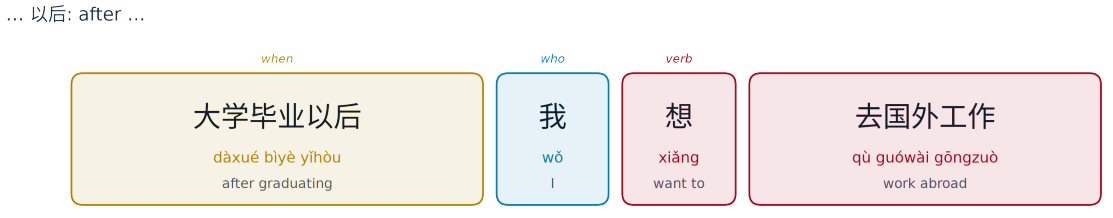
After graduation

- A friend in her final year asks what you plan to do once you finish university.
- **大学毕业以后，我想去国外工作。** – “After I graduate, I want to work abroad.”

Time / Verb phrase + 以后

- **X + 以后** = “after X”: 下课以后, 吃了饭以后, 三天以后.
- Like 以前, it follows what it refers to, and the phrase comes before the main verb.

下课以后，我们去食堂吧。
xià kè yǐ hòu wǒ men qù shí táng ba
Word guide: 下课 – class ends; 以后 – after; 我们 – we; 去 – go to; 食堂 – the canteen.



■ 以后 alone: from now on, in the future

- At the start of a sentence, 以后 = "in the future, from now on": **以后我不迟到了。** – "I won't be late again from now on."
- 以后 here refers to time after now, not after a past event.

以后我不迟到了。
yǐ hòu wǒ bù chí dào le
Word guide: 以后 – from now on; 我 – I; 不 – not; 迟到 – be late.

■ After what?

- Put 以后 after the event: 吃饭以后, not 以后吃饭 (which would mean "eat in the future").
- For the next step in a past story, prefer 后来 or 然后, not a bare 以后: 我先去了银行，然后去了超市.

■ 以后 versus 后

- 后 is the shorter form in fixed phrases: 饭后, 三天后, 毕业后.
- 以后 is more common in speech and after longer clauses: 你到了以后给我打电话。

你到了以后给我打电话。
nǐ dào le yǐ hòu gěi wǒ dǎ diàn huà
Word guide: 你 – you; 到 – arrive; 以后 – after; 给 – to; 我 – me; 打 – make; 电话 – a call.

■ Recap

- **X + 以后** = after X; **以后，...** alone = in the future, from now on.
- For "and then" in a past story, use 然后 or 后来.

Practise this pattern step by step.

... ，后来 ... (afterwards / later – past)

■ How the story ended

- You are telling a friend about a classmate who moved to Shenzhen two years ago.
- **他去了深圳，后来在那儿开了一家公司。** – "He went to Shenzhen, and later he started a company there."

■ ...，后来 ... (afterwards, later on)

- **后来** = "afterwards, later on", for what happened next in a past story.
- It starts the second clause, after a comma: 我们先是同学，后来成了好朋友.

我们先是同学，后来成了好朋友。
wǒ men xiān shì tóng xué hòu lái chéng le hǎo péng you
Word guide: 我们 – we; 先 – first; 是 – were; 同学 – classmates; 后来 – later; 成 –

became; 好朋友 – good friends.



■ Asking what happened next

- **后来呢?** – "And then what happened?" A natural way to keep a story going.
- **后来怎么样了?** – "How did it turn out in the end?"

后来怎么样了?
hòu lái zěn me yàng le
Word guide: 后来 – later; 怎么样 – how.

■ Past stories only

- 后来 is only for the past. For "later" in a plan, use 以后 or 然后: 我们以后再说.
- It stands alone as a time word; it is not added after an event: 毕业以后, not 毕业后来.

■ 后来 versus 然后

- 然后 links steps closely, one after another, in the past or future: 先洗手，然后吃饭。
- 后来 jumps forward in a story, often with a gap of time: 他小时候很瘦，后来长胖了。

他小时候很瘦，后来长胖了。
tā xiǎo shí hou hěn shòu hòu lái zhǎng pàng le
Word guide: 他 – he; 小时候 – as a child; 很 – very; 瘦 – thin; 后来 – later; 长 – grow; 胖 – fat.

■ Recap

- **...，后来 ...** = afterwards, later on, in a past story; 后来呢? = And then?
- Not for plans (use 以后 / 然后), not after an event (毕业以后).

Practise this pattern step by step.

Practice without the models

■ Time / Verb + 以前 (before ...)

0501.1 Complete: “Please come back before ten.” 请十点 …… 回来。

0501.2 Which says “Turn off the light before you leave.”?

- A. 走以前关灯。
- B. 走关灯以前。
- C. 以前走关灯。
- D. 关灯走以前。

0501.3 Build: “The homework must be handed in before Friday.”

Arrange all chunks: 以前 / 星期五 / 作业。/ 要交

0501.4 三天前 and 三天以前 both mean “three days ago”.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

0501.5 Your doctor gives you advice about a good night’s sleep. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

Write or say your own response before reading the key.

■ 以前，... (in the past, ...)

0502.1 Complete: “I used to be very shy.” 我 …… 很害羞。

0502.2 Match each sentence to its meaning.

- 1. 以前我不喝咖啡。
- 1. 喝咖啡以前，我先吃早饭。
- A. Before drinking coffee I eat breakfast.
- B. I didn’t use to drink coffee.

0502.3 Build: “He didn’t use to like spicy food.”

Arrange all chunks: 不喜欢 / 吃辣的。/ 他 / 以前

0502.4 原来 stresses that the situation later changed.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

0502.5 Your grandmother looks at old photos of her village with dirt roads and no cars. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

Write or say your own response before reading the key.

■ 刚才 (a moment ago)

0503.1 Complete: “It was raining just now; now it has stopped.” …… 在下雨，现在停了。

0503.2 Which sentence is correct?

- A. 刚才他很忙。
- B. 他很刚忙。
- C. 他忙刚才很。
- D. 刚他很忙。

0503.3 Build: “Where did you go just now?”

Arrange all chunks: 去哪儿 / 了？ / 刚才 / 你

0503.4 刚才 is a good choice for “I moved house recently.”

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

0503.5 You come back from the shower and see your roommate pointing at your phone. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

Write or say your own response before reading the key.

■ Time / Verb + 时 (when …)

0504.1 Complete: “When I got home, he was already asleep.” 我到家 ……，他已经睡了。

0504.2 Which says “Call me when you have time.”?

- A. 你什么时候有空给我打电话。
- B. 你有空的时候给我打电话。
- C. 你给我打电话有空的时候。
- D. 时候你有空给我打电话。

0504.3 Build: “In class, please turn off your phone.”

Arrange all chunks: 请关 / 手机。/ ， / 上课时

0504.4 时 is more common than 的时候 in everyday conversation.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

0504.5 You are telling a friend a story from your childhood about learning to swim. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

Write or say your own response before reading the key.

■ 以后 (after / in the future)

0505.1 Complete: “Call me after you arrive.” 你到了 …… 给我打电话。

0505.2 What does 以后我会早点儿睡 mean?

- A. I used to go to bed early.
- B. I went to bed early afterwards.
- C. From now on I’ll go to bed earlier.
- D. I went to bed after eating.

0505.3 Build: “After I graduate from university, I want to work abroad.”

Arrange all chunks: 大学毕业 / 去国外工作。/ ，我想 / 以后

0505.4 以后吃饭 means “after eating”.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

0505.5 A friend in her final year asks what you plan to do once you finish university. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

Write or say your own response before reading the key.

■ ... ，后来 ... (afterwards / later – past)

0506.1 Complete the story: “At first I didn’t like him, but later we became friends.” 开始我不喜欢他，…… 我们成了朋友。

0506.2 Which fits a plan? “Let’s eat first, then go shopping.”

- A. 我们后来吃饭，先去买东西。
- B. 我们先吃饭，然后去买东西。
- C. 我们先吃饭，后来去买东西。
- D. 我们吃饭后来，去买东西。

0506.3 Ask to continue a story: “And how did it turn out?”

Arrange all chunks: 怎么样 / 后来 / 了?

0506.4 他小时候很瘦，后来长胖了 describes a change with a gap of time.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

0506.5 You are telling a friend about a classmate who moved to Shenzhen two years ago. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

Write or say your own response before reading the key.

Answers and explanations

■ Time / Verb + 以前 (before ...)

0501.1 以前

Time + 以前 = before that time.

0501.2 A. 走以前关灯。

Action + 以前, then the main verb.

0501.3 星期五以前要交作业。

Time + 以前 + verb phrase.

0501.4 True.

前 is a shorter form of 以前 after a time.

0501.5 One possible response: 睡觉以前别看手机。

Check meaning and form:

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- Put 以前 after what it refers to: 上课以前, not 以前上课 (which means "in the past, I attended class").
- The 以前 phrase goes before the main verb, not at the end: 我十点以前回家, not 我回家十点以前.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

This is supported productive practice. Compare meaning and structure; your answer need not copy the model. A partner or teacher must hear the spoken response to comment on pronunciation.

■ 以前，... (in the past, ...)

0502.1 以前

Subject + 以前 + description = used to be.

0502.2 1–B: 以前我不喝咖啡。= I didn't use to drink coffee.; 2–A: 喝咖啡以前，我先吃早饭。= Before drinking coffee I eat breakfast.

Alone, 以前 means "in the past"; after an action it means "before".

0502.3 他以前不喜欢吃辣的。

Subject + 以前 + verb phrase.

0502.4 True.

原来 = originally (and then it changed).

0502.5 One possible response: 以前这儿没有路，现在有很多车了。

Check meaning and form:

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.

- Alone at the front or after the subject, 以前 = “in the past”: 以前我不会做饭.
- After a time or action, it = “before”: 上课以前 – “before class”. Check what comes before it.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

This is supported productive practice. Compare meaning and structure; your answer need not copy the model. A partner or teacher must hear the spoken response to comment on pronunciation.

■ 刚才 (a moment ago)

0503.1 刚才

刚才 is a time word that can start the sentence.

0503.2 A. 刚才他很忙。

刚才 can describe a state a moment ago; 刚 is not used for a past state like 很忙.

0503.3 你刚才去哪儿了?

Subject + 刚才 + verb phrase.

0503.4 False.

刚才 is only a moment ago; recently is 最近 (or 刚搬家).

0503.5 One possible response: 刚才有人给你打电话了。

Check meaning and form:

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- Use 刚才 for a moment ago in the same situation; for “recently” over days, use 最近 or 刚.
- 刚才 can go first in the sentence; 刚 cannot: 刚才他来了 ✓, 刚他来了 ×.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

This is supported productive practice. Compare meaning and structure; your answer need not copy the model. A partner or teacher must hear the spoken response to comment on pronunciation.

■ Time / Verb + 时 (when ...)

0504.1 的时候

Clause + 的时候 = when.

0504.2 B. 你有空的时候给我打电话。

The 的时候 clause comes first; 什么时候 asks “when?”.

0504.3 上课时，请关手机。

Clause + 时, then the request.

0504.4 False.

的时候 is the usual spoken form; 时 is more written.

0504.5 One possible response: 我小的时候常常去河边游泳。

Check meaning and form:

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- 时 / 的时候 goes after the clause: 下雨的时候, not 时候下雨.
- In a "when" clause, do not use 什么时候 (that asks "when?"): 我到家的时候, not 我什么时候到家.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

This is supported productive practice. Compare meaning and structure; your answer need not copy the model. A partner or teacher must hear the spoken response to comment on pronunciation.

■ 以后 (after / in the future)

0505.1 以后

Event + 以后 = after that event.

0505.2 C. From now on I'll go to bed earlier.

以后 alone at the start refers to the future.

0505.3 大学毕业以后，我想去国外工作。

Event + 以后, then the main clause.

0505.4 False.

After eating is 吃饭以后; 以后吃饭 means "eat in the future".

0505.5 One possible response: 大学毕业以后，我想去国外工作。

Check meaning and form:

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- Put 以后 after the event: 吃饭以后, not 以后吃饭 (which would mean "eat in the future").
- For the next step in a past story, prefer 后来 or 然后, not a bare 以后: 我先去了银行，然后去了超市.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

This is supported productive practice. Compare meaning and structure; your answer need not copy the model. A partner or teacher must hear the spoken response to comment on pronunciation.

■ ... ，后来 ... (afterwards / later – past)

0506.1 后来

后来 introduces what happened later in a past story.

0506.2 B. 我们先吃饭，然后去买东西。

后来 is only for past stories; a plan uses 然后.

0506.3 后来怎么样了?

后来怎么样了?

0506.4 True.

后来 jumps forward in a past story.

0506.5 One possible response: 他去了深圳，后来在那儿开了一家公司。

Check meaning and form:

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- 后来 is only for the past. For "later" in a plan, use 以后 or 然后: 我们以后再说.
- It stands alone as a time word; it is not added after an event: 毕业以后, not 毕业后来.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

This is supported productive practice. Compare meaning and structure; your answer need not copy the model. A partner or teacher must hear the spoken response to comment on pronunciation.